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CHRIST THE BOND OF HUMANITY¹

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"In him all things consist"; that is, "hold together" (Col. 1:17).

We live in days when the bonds on which we have hitherto relied to hold humanity together have suddenly broken, and their failure is plain for all the world to see. Christmas, the world-wide festival of peace and good will among men, finds the world divided into two hostile camps; and between them rages not only a storm of shot and shell, but a veritable tempest of hate and fury. The shot that was fired first in the heart of Europe has found not only echo but countless repetition in the Near East and in southern Asia, on the Chinese seaboard and off the South American coast, and even in southwest Africa: only North America among the world's five continents has not heard the sound of hostile firing—and even she is supplying her quota of men for the struggle and the slaughter. The mere fact of all this is so vast and staggering that we Americans at least are still rubbing our eyes in an effort to realize it as actually existing; and as current discussion abundantly shows, we have not yet begun to agree on the conclusions and the lessons to be drawn from this awful reality. But the mere fact itself has made some things already plain; and on this Christmas Sunday morning I want to center your attention first on the most obvious of these plain facts of the

present situation—that the ties in which we trusted to bind mankind together in peace and prosperity have suddenly proved impotent to do so. The hoops of humanity have broken, and the barrel is collapsed.

What were these ties? We had all hoped and a great many of us had believed that the progress of *civilization* had brought mankind to a point where it would no longer resort, like the animals or the cave-men or the savages, to brute force to advance its interests or settle its disputes. We trusted that in the process of social evolution we had outgrown war. But now we are shocked into the realization that our very science and invention have multiplied the horrors of war by placing new instruments of destruction at the disposal of malice; that modern methods of organization have vastly enlarged the range and increased the paralyzing effects of warfare; and that modern means of instantaneous communication and rapid transportation have made the finger of every nation so quick on the trigger that in a present-day international duel both combatants are likely to be vitally if not fatally wounded. Our boasted civilization has not prevented war: by placing new instruments of torture at the disposal of devilish dispositions it has made it more hellish than ever.

Nor has *education* held humanity together in peace and concord. We

¹ A sermon preached at the Hyde Park Baptist Church, December 20, 1914.

might have expected that the German nation, which has made the greatest contributions to modern science and scholarship, the English people, whose culture has been most broad-based and poised and human, the French, whose intellect has been quickest and most intuitive, would have been able to substitute the rule of reason for the appeal to force and settle their disputes by rational means. But these three nations are at the heart of the struggle; their most learned professors have suddenly become their bitterest partisans; and the mutual enmity between the two foremost and the most closely related of them by ties both of blood and culture, Germany and England, is almost savage in its fury. Education may train men but cannot bind them.

And *industry*, financial and commercial relationships, international trade and economic interdependence—how impotent have they proved to hold men and nations together! We had been told times without number that the great war we were all fearing would never come because the capitalists would not let it; and one thoughtful and influential modern writer, Norman Angell, had partly persuaded a whole nation that wars never pay because their advantage even to the victor is illusory. The present war has not disproved his argument—it may even reinforce it. But it has shown conclusively that we cannot rely on that argument to prevent war; that any nation will fight when it wants to, regardless of the cost; and that some nations at least will deliberately go to war to extend or at least to defend their markets and their trade. It begins to look to some of us now as

if commercial self-interest were more frequent and potent as a cause of war than commercial interdependence can be as a guaranty against war. Business may make men rivals—it never makes them brothers.

And now, you say, having suggested that civilization and education and business have failed to bind men and nations together, doubtless the preacher is going to claim that *religion* can do it. But has not religion failed as conspicuously as these other things? Are not these very nations that are at war nominally at least Christian—and does not this war then prove the failure of Christianity? So a great many hasty generalizers in our time are asserting. And I grant there is much that seems to confirm their impression. Plainly the Christian church has failed to bind men together—is it not today split up into countless sects and schools, more schismatic than any state? But the reason for its division is that it, like other very human institutions, has been seeking to make its bond of union a common opinion in theology or a common preference in ritual; and to the end of time men's minds and men's tastes will never agree. For neither of these are fully under their control, but are partly at least determined, in the one case by the facts as they see them, in the other by the traits of their native temperament. It is only men's *wills* that can agree, for those alone are under their complete control. They can hold themselves parallel and harmonious in spite of differences in opinion or taste, just as soldiers hold themselves in line or step in spite of differences in height or appearance. Now education

and business and civilization have failed to hold men together because they appeal to and affect primarily men's minds which differ, and men's interests which run counter to each other. Religion alone appeals to, modifies, and seeks to control men's wills and bring them into harmony. And the reason why Christianity cannot fairly be blamed for the present failure of the world to hold together is that it has never yet been granted, much less has it ever maintained, control of the wills of men except in individual cases all too few—and in social and international relations it has only just begun to dawn on us that Christianity seeks control. In other and familiar words, Christianity cannot be said to have failed, for it has not been tried.

And with that we come to the text. Paul says that it is in Jesus Christ that all things "consist"—or, in the more vivid Anglo-Saxon phrase of the margin, "hold together." Now I shall not interpret this remarkable text to you this morning in the metaphysical or rather cosmological sense that was evidently partly at least present in Paul's mind when he wrote this chapter; in the ecclesiastical sense in which he might have written these same words in his Ephesian letter; or even in the mystical sense in which these words had such a profound and personal significance for him. I want to take them in their simple and obvious social sense. The Christ to whom I refer them is the Jesus the whole spirit of whose life was gathered up in the angels' song on the first Christmas Day: "Peace on earth among men of good will." It is the Jesus who went about

doing good, treating all men as his brothers because they were children of the one Father, and seeking with their help to do that Father's just and benevolent will here on earth. It is the Jesus who finally yielded up his life to the hatred of his enemies rather than change that attitude toward them: the attitude of *invincible good will*.

Now it is that spirit of invincible good will, so perfectly exemplified and incarnated in Jesus that through all the centuries since we have recognized it as *his* spirit, have found in him its most abundant source and in personal relations with him the deep secret of its contagious acquisition, and have believed that this spirit incarnate in his human life is the very divine Spirit of the living God—it is this divine spirit of invincible good will in and through which alone men hold together. That is the heart of the text.

But I do not want to rest my case this Christmas Sunday morning merely on the unsupported assertion even of so great a saying as this. I want equally to call your attention to the large and rapidly increasing body of evidence, out of all departments of our human life, which goes to show that this assertion is actually borne out by experience, and therefore holds out rich promise of its wider and larger application. I suppose we would all agree that of all human institutions the family has been most largely Christianized—that there this spirit of invincible good will is most completely expressed. Now when you come into a home where this spirit is shared by all its members, young and old, how closely held together that family is in all its interests—how com-

pletely one! But when you find a home split up or on the verge of disintegration, how steadily is the underlying cause found to be this lack of a spirit of mutual good will. The family, both in its success and in its failure, is powerful evidence of the cohesive power of this spirit of Jesus.

Let me bring you further evidence out of the very heart of that *race problem* which so often seems like an unavoidable rock upon which our American ship of state, and indeed our whole system of international relations, must shatter. How often we hear some of our fellow-citizens lamenting our later immigration and predicting that it must prove the ruin of our national unity. But how often are these pessimists the very men and women who are least acquainted with the immigrant personally! The social and settlement worker, on the other hand, who knows these latest comers at first-hand—how often is he their most enthusiastic partisan! The worker among the Italians glorifies their attractiveness and charm; the worker among the Jews cannot tell enough of their keen responsiveness and gratitude: and both unite in glowing predictions of their future as patriotic American citizens. So is it, too, abroad. Those who belittle or denounce the Oriental are as a rule the globe-trotters who without any first-hand acquaintance pick up most of their information in the coast cities from business men whose purpose in being there is to exploit the native commercially. Is it not beautifully significant, on the other hand, that the most enthusiastic praises of the character and the possibilities of foreign

peoples come uniformly from the missionaries, whose long residence and intimate knowledge of the people they are trying to serve has been prompted by Jesus' own spirit of good will? It is that spirit, and that spirit alone, that binds races together.

I should like if there were time to apply this same principle to our social and to our industrial problem—to the relations between classes, and between capital and labor. But leaving those conspicuous illustrations to your own thought, let me point out its bearing on our *international relations*. Today the churches of Britain and America celebrate the hundredth anniversary of peace between English-speaking peoples. The most notable effect, and some of us believe a conspicuous cause, of that peace has been the 3,000 miles of unfortified border between ourselves and Canada. Put forts and soldiers and war vessels along that border, get ready for war in a spirit of mutual suspicion—and, as Miss Addams said the other day, within fifty years we should have a war. It is precisely the same in our relations with Japan or any other nation. Talk about war as inevitable, expect it, prepare for it, *and you will have it*. Cultivate a spirit of mutual good will and you will escape it. That spirit of good will is the only bond that holds nations as well as men together.

For let me remind you this Christmas Sabbath morning that the peace on earth which the angels' song foretold depends on a condition and involves a limitation: "Peace on earth among men of good will"—so runs the old Latin version. If you cultivate or cherish an attitude of distrust or suspicion, of

rivalry or competition toward your neighbor, you cannot expect to live at peace with him; for that attitude always and inevitably breeds trouble. If we as a nation arm ourselves for war either offensive or defensive against any nation whose motives we suspect without cause, or whose rights and feelings we fail to respect, we shall have that war; for that attitude inevitably leads to it. Let us then as individuals examine our own hearts today, whether we are really men of invincible good

will. Let us as a nation examine our own hands, whether they be clean of acts of aggression, our own hearts, whether they be free of overbearing pride and racial snobbishness and insolence. For only when we have washed our hands of our own injustice and cleansed our hearts of our own ill will, can we expect the fulfilment in our time of the ancient vision and promise of the angels on the first Christmas: "Peace on earth among men of good will."